

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR BEGINNERS
AN ONLINE RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS OF ELLS

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of
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Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

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Abstract

As numbers of ELLs in schools grow, all teachers need to be prepared with a specialized knowledge based about best practices for teaching this student population. Theories about how students acquire second language and how to support that second language acquisition process in the classroom are important topics to include in this teacher preparation. ESL teachers serve as the expert in schools on teaching ELLs and often provide training and give guidance to mainstream classroom teachers. Many teachers who seek to learn more about how to support the ELLs in their classrooms often face challenges with limited time and financial resources to pursue that professional development. To address the need for teacher training with these obstacles in mind, the product of this paper is a website that offers an introduction to theories related to second language acquisition and their implications in the classroom. Included in this project are the five stages of second language acquisition, the BICS/CALP distinction, the input hypothesis, affective filter hypothesis and the total physical response teaching method.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my students. Their resilience, openness, and dedication is a constant source of inspiration and motivation to keep learning and to keep growing as a teacher.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the entire faculty of the Masters of Arts in TESOL program at Greensboro College. Over the past few years, I have learned so much from all of you because of your dedication and passion for education. I would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Michelle Plaisance for being there every step of the way to provide guidance and encouragement, and to Professor Paula Wilder for your patience and feedback that made the completion of this final thesis project possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The English language holds a unique position in the world today—it is a global language. Kaufman and Crandall (2005) described the effects of this by saying, “the unprecedented spread of English throughout the world in recent years has resulted in its major role and high prestige in the academic, cultural, and political landscape in a growing number of countries” (p. 1). Linguist David Crystal, in his book *English as a Global Language* (2003), showed that one-fourth of the world’s population is already fluent or competent in English, and that the global growth of the English language is faster than that of any other language. As more people learn English, there is an increased demand for English language teachers who are trained and prepared to meet the unique needs of English language learners. Teachers of English language learners benefit greatly from an understanding of the processes involved in second language acquisition and the best practices for teaching a second language.

In my current position as the K-12 English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at an international school in La Paz, Bolivia, my job often requires me to provide teachers with training on topics related to second language learning and how to best support English language learners (ELLs) in their classes. According to TESOL International, this role is not unique, as school ESL teachers often, not only teach English, but also provide teacher training (Fenner, 2013).

Teacher training is necessary as ESL students spend much of the school day in mainstream classes as they acquire the language of instruction (Gándara et al., 2005; Besterman, et al., 2018). When teaching academic content to students who are learning in a second language,

a specialized knowledge base about second language acquisition is helpful (Kaufman & Crandall, 2005; Raitbauer et al., 2018). Teachers with ELLs in their mainstream classes should understand their unique needs in order to teach their content in a way that is accessible to all learners in their classroom (Fenner, 2013; Hiatt, 2016; Raitbauer et al., 2018). ESL teachers serve as a resource for schools in matters related to second language acquisition and supporting ELLs in the classroom in order to meet this need.

The role of serving as a teacher trainer that ESL teachers often undertake comes in the form of providing professional development sessions during teacher workdays as well as day to day consultation about specific students and specific content-area challenges. The educational opportunities for content area teachers in these capacities are helpful but are often limited by time constraints. In my current teaching context, the large majority of our students are learning English as a second language. Every semester we get new students who speak little to no English and who have often never gone to an all-English school. Due to this, the need to understand how to best support ELLs is keenly felt by all of our teachers.

I began teaching ESL as a volunteer to meet a need at a high school in the United States with a large ELL student population. I found that in order to feel prepared to effectively teach these students, I had to understand how we learn languages. Motivated to help these students, I began to search for answers about how we acquire languages and how a new language is taught when the teacher does not share a common language with the student. Through my initial searching, I discovered that I was very interested in this process. This search eventually led me to the Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language program at Greensboro College.

Not all people who find themselves teaching ELLs without any training or experience will have the desire or the ability to pursue formal training in this subject. However, I have seen

that most teachers I have worked with who teach ELLs share the motivation to learn about the language learning process in order to better help them succeed academically. The product of this thesis project is a website designed with teachers and volunteers like myself and my colleagues in mind.

The product of this project is an online resource for teachers of ELLs who have had little to no formal training or experience working with this specific student population. The resource is a website to ensure ease of sharing between teachers. The website provides a concise and accessible way for interested teachers to discover prominent theories of second language acquisition and the implications for ELLs in the classroom. The product is designed as a tool to be used in pre-service teacher education, during in-service professional development sessions, or for motivated individuals to seek out on their own to better understand this process of how to learn a new language.

Lack of time, accessible resources, and motivation are just some of the many obstacles that hinder those teaching ELLs from pursuing training or information on this topic. Additionally, teachers who are looking for resources may be intimidated by books or scholarly articles that address the topic in great detail (Dubiner, 2018). With these obstacles in mind, the website is intentionally designed to be user-friendly, visually appealing, and informational, without being overwhelming.

The website presents the user with information about the process and stages of second language acquisition, the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, Krashen's input hypothesis and affective filter hypothesis, and the role of background knowledge, including first language use, in the classroom. These topics will ensure that ESL teachers have a resource to share with content area

teachers when they want to know more about teaching ELLs, or feel unprepared to help their ELL students. I hope that they will feel empowered when they know more about researchers' findings in the fields of learning and teaching a second language.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Acquiring a second language is a complex process that many scholars have researched and theorized about. Though ELLs do receive specialized ESL classes to support them in this process of second language acquisition, an overwhelming percentage of their school day is spent in the mainstream classroom (Hiatt, 2016; Samson & Collins, 2012; Walker & Edstam, 2013). For this reason, many researchers have acknowledged the need for specialized training for all teachers of ELLs in the areas of second language acquisition and how to support it in the classroom (Chang, 2015; Hiatt, 2016; Raitbauer et al., 2018). In this chapter, I will present research findings about the areas that scholars state as important for teachers of ELLs to know to support their students' English language development. After exploring what scholars have found as important for teachers of ELLs to know, the topics addressed by scholars will be presented. Included in these topics are the distinction between social and academic language, the process of second language acquisition, the affective filter hypothesis, and the input hypothesis. Implications for teaching ELLs in mainstream classes will be discussed in each section. Additionally, total physical response will be presented as an example of one teaching method that can be used by teachers of ELLs to support second language acquisition in the classroom. This chapter will conclude with research about the current state of teacher training in the identified areas.

Teacher Preparation for ELLs

Many researchers have addressed the subject of teachers' preparation to work with ELLs. This section is dedicated to what researchers have asserted is important in mainstream teachers' pre- or in-service training to prepare them to best support ELLs. Lopez et al. (2013) asserted that all teachers, not just specialized ESL teachers, should be required to have training in English language development and how to foster it in their classes. The researchers stated that this training should include ways to make input comprehensible to all students, providing visual supports and creating opportunities for in-class communication (Lopez et al., 2013). Similarly, Jong and Harper (2005) emphasized the importance of teachers being familiar with the stages of second language development and how to provide cognitively challenging tasks for students in all stages of English language development. Chang (2015) suggested more specifically that teachers should be trained in Krashen's theories of acquisition and learning distinction, the five stages of language acquisition, comprehensible input, natural order, the affective filter, and monitor hypotheses.

Lucas et al. (2008) stated various essential understandings for teachers of ELLs: the differences between academic language and conversational language and how to support the development of both in the classroom, knowledge of students' backgrounds, an understanding of the linguistic demands of each classroom task they are asking students to do, and expertise in how to scaffold these tasks so that all students are able to complete them. Giambo et al. (2005) concurred that teachers should be trained in Cummins' theories of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and the Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP). Wilson (2017) stated that teachers need to know the linguistic demands of the classroom activities they are asking students to complete. Jong &

Harper (2005) emphasized the importance of knowing the distinction between academic and social language in order to explicitly support the academic language acquisition of ELLs. Russell (2015) suggested that mainstream teachers should be trained in linguistic and culturally responsive pedagogy in which the teachers are familiar with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in their classroom, identifying the linguistic demands of the classroom for the students, and scaffolding instruction to support the students.

Scholars have shown a consensus that teachers of ELLs need to have a specialized knowledge base that includes the process of second language acquisition and how that process can be supported in the classroom, the demands of academic language, how teachers can make academic content accessible to ELLs, and the need to be aware of students' backgrounds academically, linguistically, and culturally.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

Cummins (1979) suggested a distinction between acquiring academic language and conversational language. The terminology of BICS and CALP to refer to the two aspects of language proficiency began with Cummins' work. Cummins stated that the average language learner acquires BICS, the conversational language used in interactions in the second language, in six months to two years. In contrast, the development of CALP, which includes the academic language needed for learning content in the subject areas in the second language, generally takes between five to seven years (Fang, 2018).

The BICS/CALP distinction has been criticized for oversimplifying the complex, interconnected nature of academic language and social language (Ranney, 2012). However, Cummins (1999) clarified that the distinction is made as a theory for understanding the

achievement gap between bilingual students and their monolingual peers. The implications of understanding the distinction between BICS and CALP is to clarify misconceptions of language proficiency that result in ELLs not receiving adequate support in the classroom. Cummins (1999) wrote about ELLs being exited from ESL programs early because of their proficiency in communicative language, while their academic language proficiency was overlooked. Cummins (1999) asserted that the academic failure of ELLs can be prevented by understanding this distinction and providing adequate support in developing the academic language, not just social language, necessary to succeed in mainstream classes (Cummins, 1999).

Cummins (1983) expanded upon the BICS/CALP distinction by developing two intersecting continua as a visual to understand the cognitive demands of any given instructional task. The two continua form a quadrant that is used to categorize the linguistic and cognitive demands of tasks. The horizontal continuum spans from “context-embedded” to “context-reduced” (Cummins, 1983). This concerns the degree to which the learner can augment their understanding of an academic task with non-linguistic cues or must rely on purely linguistic cues. The vertical continuum spans from “cognitively undemanding” to “cognitively demanding.” This concerns the level of cognitive work that is required for a given task: whether it requires many new cognitive processes or is largely automated, or mastered. While everyday communication is often context-embedded and cognitively undemanding, language use in academic settings is often context-reduced and cognitively demanding (Mozayan, 2015).

This quadrant framework provided a visual representation of understanding the cognitive and linguistic demands of classroom tasks. The framework has been used for instructional planning purposes as teachers can plan to begin instruction with more context-embedded, cognitively undemanding tasks and can gradually advance throughout the lesson or unit to more

context-reduced, cognitively demanding tasks (Montgomery, 2008; Frankfurt International School, n.d.).

Krashen's Theories of Second Language Acquisition

As shown previously, scholars have agreed on the importance of all teachers knowing the process of acquiring a second language to be able to identify the stages in the process students are currently in and to support their English language development in the classroom (Lopez et al., 2013; Jong & Harper, 2005; Russell, 2015). Chang (2005) cited Krashen's theories of second language acquisition specifically in being a helpful resource in developing this understanding. This section provides an overview of Krashen's second language acquisition theories and their implications for teaching ELLs.

The Process of Second Language Acquisition

Stephen Krashen's work and research on second language acquisition theory are fundamental theories in second language pedagogy (Shütz, 2019; Whenzong & Muchun, 2015). Krashen's theory of second language acquisition is comprised of five main hypotheses: the acquisition-learning hypothesis, input hypothesis, monitor hypothesis, affective filter hypothesis, and natural order hypothesis (Shütz, 2019). Krashen and Terrell (1995) defined five predictable stages that language learners progress through as they acquire a second language. The five stages are preproduction, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency. Familiarity with the predictable stages of language acquisition allows teachers of ELLs to be able to recognize the stage in the process that each individual learner is in, have reasonable

expectations for the learner in the classroom, and tailor instructional activities more effectively to the learner's current language proficiency (Taberski & Burke, 2014).

The first stage, preproduction, is a period before which the learner will speak English but is primarily listening (Chang, 2015). The preproduction stage is also referred to as the "silent period" as it is characterized largely by the learner's silence, while they listen and build a receptive vocabulary of up to 500 words. This stage generally lasts from initial exposure to the language up to six months (Krashen & Terrell, 1995). Teachers should understand and respect the preproduction stage as an important and necessary step in the acquisition process, and not force the learner to speak prematurely (Hong, 2008). The second stage, early production, involves the learner expressing words and short phrases and can last between six months to one year after initial exposure to the second language (Chang, 2015; Hong, 2008). In this stage, learners have a receptive and productive vocabulary, that is words they can comprehend and use, of about 1,000 words (Krashen & Terrell, 1995). The third stage, speech emergence, refers to the period during which the learner will start to form phrases and simple sentences (Chang, 2015). In this stage, the learner has around 1,000 words in their receptive and productive vocabulary. Students can demonstrate their listening comprehension at this stage through responding to simple questions (yes/no, either/or, who/what/where) (Hong, 2008). The fourth stage, intermediate fluency, describes the time in which the learner uses more complex sentences in both speech and writing to express ideas (Chang, 2015). In intermediate fluency, the learner's vocabulary has reached around 6,000 words (Hong, 2008). In the fifth stage, advanced fluency, the learner has achieved proficiency in the second language like that of their native-speaking peers of the same age (Chang, 2015). Learners generally achieve this level of fluency between five to seven years of initial exposure to the language. In this stage, learners have developed

specialized content area vocabulary and can use the language to learn grade-level content with occasional extra support (Hong, 2008).

It is significant to note that, especially in the early stages, listening comprehension plays an important role in the learner's acquisition of the second language (Caruso et al., 2017). Understanding these stages of language acquisition can help teachers understand the overall process of second language acquisition, identify the current stage of each learner, and modify instruction to the learner, as needed, to help them advance in the process.

The Input Hypothesis

Krashen's input hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1995) has indicated that we acquire language through hearing and understanding the language spoken by others. In order to advance in the language acquisition process, the learner needs to hear and understand input that is just beyond their current level of comprehension (Krashen & Terrell, 1995). To conceptualize this concept, Krashen refers to the learner's current level of language proficiency as i and represents the level just beyond that as $i + 1$ (Xu, 2011). For the input that is just beyond their current level of proficiency to be made comprehensible, there must be support both linguistically (clear articulation, the use of more high-frequency vocabulary, fewer idioms and slang words, and short and simple sentence structures) and non-linguistically (pictures and objects that contextualize speech, gestures, and audiovisual material) (Krashen & Terrell, 1995). According to this hypothesis, learner's speech will develop naturally from acquiring the language through listening, and the greatest purpose of "output", or speech, in the language acquisition process is to further opportunities for comprehensible input to be provided (extending a conversation through responding appropriately, asking questions when input is not understood, etc.) (Xu,

2011). This hypothesis is supported through comparisons between the way babies acquire their first language, which is by hearing speech directed towards the child that is simplified for them and spoken with context. The speech directed at the child naturally becomes more complex as the child grows (Krashen & Terrell, 1995).

One implication for the input hypothesis in the classroom is that learners should be provided with challenging input that is supported non-linguistic clues (Thomas, 2014). Krashen and Terrell (1995) stated that this hypothesis redefines the role of the second language teacher as one who provides these opportunities for comprehensible input.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1995) theorized that affective variables, such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, explain why even if students receive comprehensible input, they still may not acquire the language. The affective filter hypothesis suggests that a high affective filter (low motivation, low self-confidence, and high anxiety) will inhibit language acquisition (Krashen & Terrell, 1995). However, when the affective filter is low (low anxiety, high motivation, and high self-confidence) input can lead to acquired language (Krashen & Terrell, 1995).

The classroom implications of the affective filter hypothesis are that for the classroom to be a context in which language is acquired, the learning environment must raise student's motivation and self-confidence and lower their anxiety (Krashen & Terrell, 1995). Many scholars have cited this theory as effective in choosing educational materials and teaching methods to increase student interest and motivation (Wenzhong & Muchun, 2015). Other

scholars have incorporated the use of songs in teaching grammatical concepts as a response to the affective filter hypothesis (Roslim et al., 2011).

Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) is one language teaching method that teachers can implement to support language acquisition in the classroom, taking the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis into account (Krashen & Terrell, 1995; Asher, 1969). Total Physical Response is a language teaching method that was developed by James Asher (1969) in which students are asked to perform a whole-body physical response to an instruction given by the teacher. These instructions can start as basic as “stand up” and can build in complexity as the learners’ language proficiency develops further (Oflaz, 2019; Khorasgani & Khanehgir, 2017). This teaching method has been shown to increase the amount of comprehensible input that the learner is exposed to in a way that also lowers the affective filter (Oflaz, 2019). Asher (1969) argued, in agreement with Krashen and Terrell’s (1995) hypotheses, that listening comprehension should precede attempts to speak the second language. In classrooms where the Total Physical Response method is used, students spend a significant amount of time building their listening comprehension before they ever need to produce speech in the language (Asher, 1969; Khorasgani & Khanehgir, 2017). Total Physical Response increases the comprehensible input available to the learner, as the language being spoken by the teacher is accompanied by physical movements which provide non-linguistic context for the learner to understand new vocabulary and grammatical structures (Asher, 1969). Additionally, Total Physical Response has been shown to lower the affective filter by lowering student anxiety about their ability to

learn the second language; as a result, in classrooms where this method is used, students have shown growth in speaking skills in the second language as well (Oflaz, 2019).

The Need for Teacher Training

As shown earlier in this chapter, there is a consensus amongst researchers that all teachers need specialized knowledge to best support the ELLs in their classes. Russell (2015) stated that the responsibility of providing training and support for teachers with ELLs in the mainstream classroom often falls on the ESL teacher as they serve as the expert in their schools. Creese (2002) asserted that ESL teachers often lack the necessary time, training, or positionality to provide such training to all staff.

DelliCarpini and Alonso (2014) confirmed that "...most ELLs spend most of the school day in mainstream classrooms with teachers who are often unprepared to work with them" (p. 156). Teachers who were knowledgeable about students' linguistic needs still found it challenging to identify students' proficiency levels and the demands of their content area on ELLs (Harrison & McIlwain, 2020).

Thus, in addition to teaching ESL classes, an important role of the ESL teacher is to be an advocate for the ELLs in their school and a consultant for mainstream teachers providing education on how to best serve the ELLs in the mainstream classroom (Maxwell, 2014; Samson & Collins, 2012). Harrison and McIlwain (2020) found that advocacy for ELLs is a part of the job of an ESL teacher and that providing teacher training is one way that ESL teachers advocate for the academic success of ELLs.

Chapter 3: Project Design

In this chapter, I explain the rationale for the design of the final product of this project. In Chapter 2, the need for specialized teacher training in second language acquisition was established in order for teachers to best support the ELL students in mainstream classes. The product of this project is a website for professional development designed for teachers of ELLs with limited knowledge of or training in theories of second language acquisition. The website provides an introduction to the stages of second language acquisition, the input hypothesis, the affective filter hypothesis, and the distinction between social and academic language proficiencies. Alongside introductions to each theoretical concept listed previously, practical implications for ELLs in mainstream classes will be shown. Lastly, the website will include a space for discussion and question asking about each section.

The website is designed in response to a need for teacher training resources that are free and accessible to all teachers. Smith et al. (2007) demonstrated that the field of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) has not been able to meet the global demands for English language teaching through formal professional training programs due to factors, such as lack of time while maintaining a full-time career, limited funding, and family commitments. Henrichson (2010) stated that many programs have been developed to provide teacher training for teaching ELLs, but the resources developed have had limited impact due to lack of time and financial resources. Online training for teachers has gained popularity as it lends itself to a wider geographical reach, accessibility, and flexible formatting (Fernandez, 2011). Additionally, online training offers more opportunities for the use of visual supports in training and for connections to be made among educators that are geographically separated (Amador et al., 2019).

The rationale for the free product that is a website is to overcome these factors that may discourage teachers from pursuing professional development in how to best support ESL students in their classes. Teachers can access it at any time, free of charge, from any place in the world. As previously stated, there are further benefits to an online training resource such as being able to utilize technology to provide visual supports. Additionally, videos and audio can be easily incorporated into online platforms. With a wealth of information and resources already available on the internet, online training resources can leverage this and seamlessly embed outside sources of information onto one platform.

For the reasons stated above, this project will meet the need shown for specialized training for teachers of ELLs, taking into account the common obstacles to pursuing professional development and allowing for the product to be accessible regardless of time, financial resources, or geographical location. ESL teachers will have a resource to pass on to other teachers who illicit their help to understand how to best support the ELLs in their classroom. Teachers, upon receiving the resource, can study the topics included on the website as their own schedule allows and can revisit the information as needed.

In addition to the website being widely accessible, providing an online resource at the mainstream teachers' own requests can provide a more motivating learning experience than a mandatory professional development session at individual schools. Yurtseven Yilmaz & Sever (2021) discovered in their study of professional development for Turkish language teachers that professional development sessions felt forced and were widely regarded as unhelpful, thus decreasing teachers' willingness to engage in the training provided. In contrast, an online resource that can be passed along at the teacher's request for more information can leverage the teachers' intrinsic motivation. Researchers have named and explored two different types of

motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. On the one hand, intrinsic motivation is that which comes from “choosing to do an activity in order to gain pleasure from it or in order to help achieve an internalized goal” (Ferlazzo, 2015, p. 2). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is “doing a specific behavior in order to get an outside reward” (Ferlazzo, 2015, p. 2). The former, Ferlazzo (2015) stated, is more powerful. As the resource is shared with teachers based on their own requests, the opportunities provided for professional development are greater as the resource is a response to their own awareness of the need to support ELLs in their classes better. Instead of being forced upon teachers, the resource is a tool for achieving their own goals to promote learning for all students in their classroom.

The product of this project is a website that can be easily shared among teachers of ELLs to introduce them to the process of second language acquisition, the input and affective filter hypotheses, and the distinction between social and academic language. The rationale for the design of this product is to mitigate the common obstacles researchers have determined that may prevent teachers from pursuing professional development in these areas. The online platform will provide teachers with a free, shareable, accessible resource to learn from at their own pace, as their schedules allow. In addition to mitigating obstacles, an online training resource takes full advantage of technology and the wide range of helpful information that already exists for all on the internet.

Chapter 4: The Project

In this chapter, the final product of this project is presented. As described briefly in Chapter 3, this product is a website for professional development designed for teachers of ELLs with limited knowledge of or training in theories of second language acquisition. The website explains the theories presented in Chapter 2 related to second language acquisition and their implications for teaching ELLs. Additionally, the website provides a space for discussion amongst teachers to ask and answer questions regarding the website content. The title of the webpage is “Second Language Acquisition for Beginners: An Online Resource for Teachers of English Language Learners.” The website can be accessed through the following link:

<https://sites.google.com/view/sla-for-beginners/home>.

On the home page of the website, users will find the website’s title and information about the project and the author. Additionally, the home page contains five buttons: “Importance of Studying Second Language Acquisition,” “How Long it Takes To Acquire a Language,” “How We Acquire Language,” “Stages of Acquiring a Language” (Figure 4.1), and a button that links to the discussion forum inviting users to join the discussion and ask a question (Figure 4.2). The five buttons link to the pages that contain the website’s content.

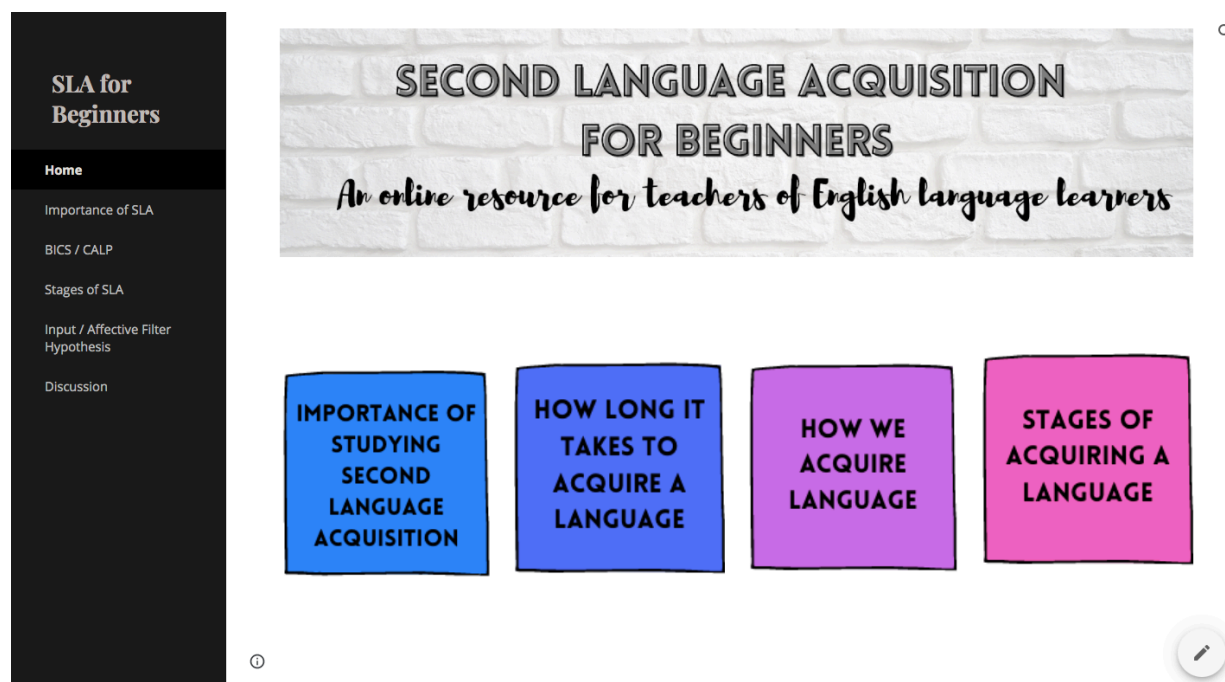


Figure 4.1: Home Page Part 1



Figure 4.2: Home Page Part 2

The first button, “Importance of Studying Second Language Acquisition,” will direct users to the informational page entitled: “Why Study Second Language Acquisition?” which defines the need for all teachers of ELLs to have specialized training on this topic (Figure 4.3).

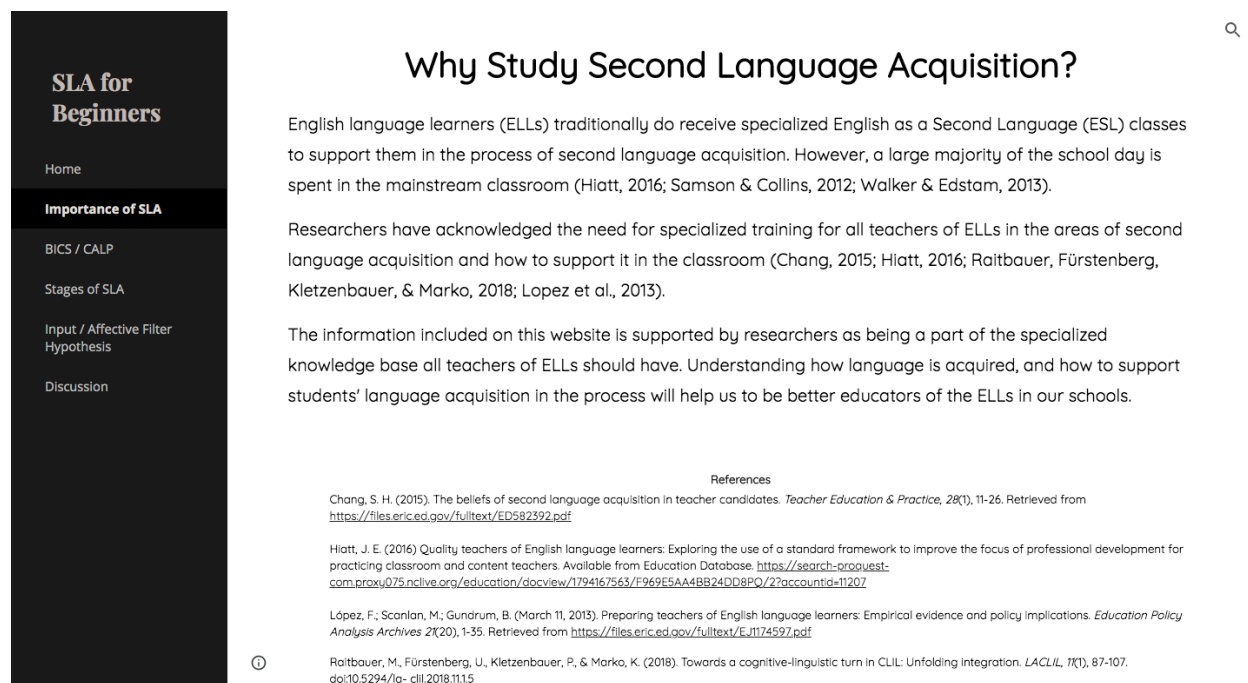


Figure 4.3: Importance of Studying Second Language Acquisition

The second button, “How Long it Takes To Acquire a Second Language” leads users to a page entitled “Second Language Acquisition Timeline” (Figure 4.4). On this page, the distinction between BICS and CALP is explained and the approximate timeline for reaching proficiency in both social and academic language is presented. Additionally, a few classroom implications of the BICS/CALP distinction are explained (Figure 4.5).

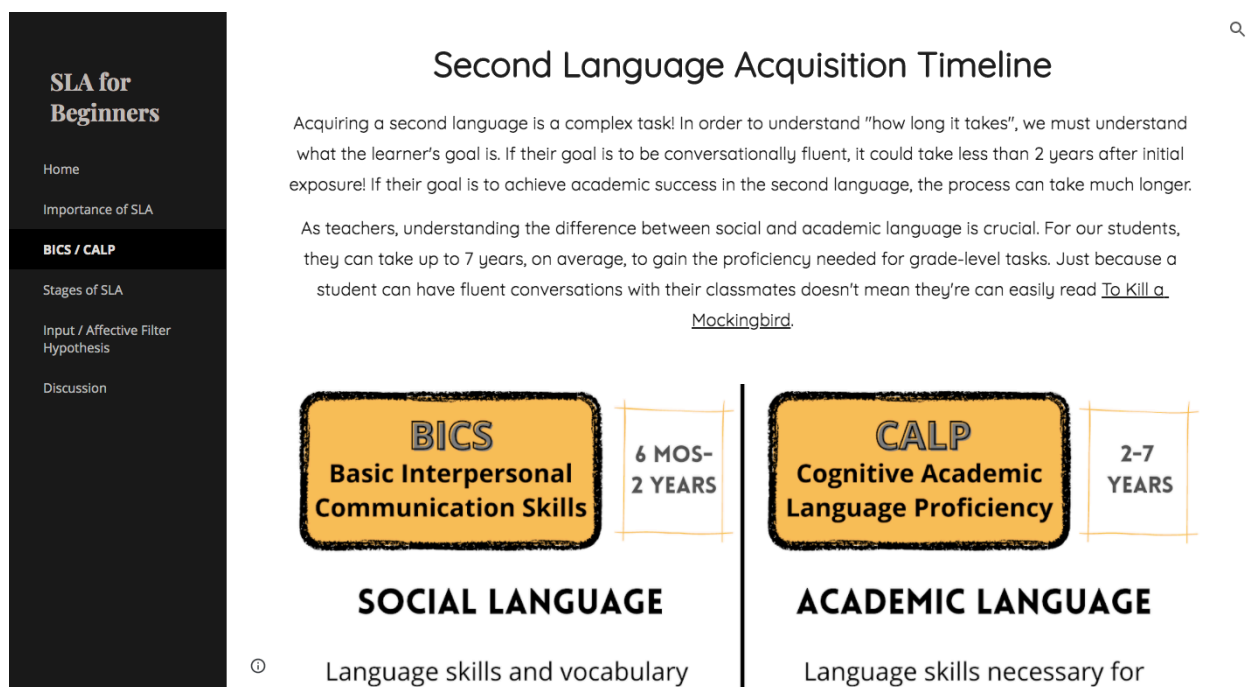


Figure 4.4: Second Language Acquisition Timeline Part 1

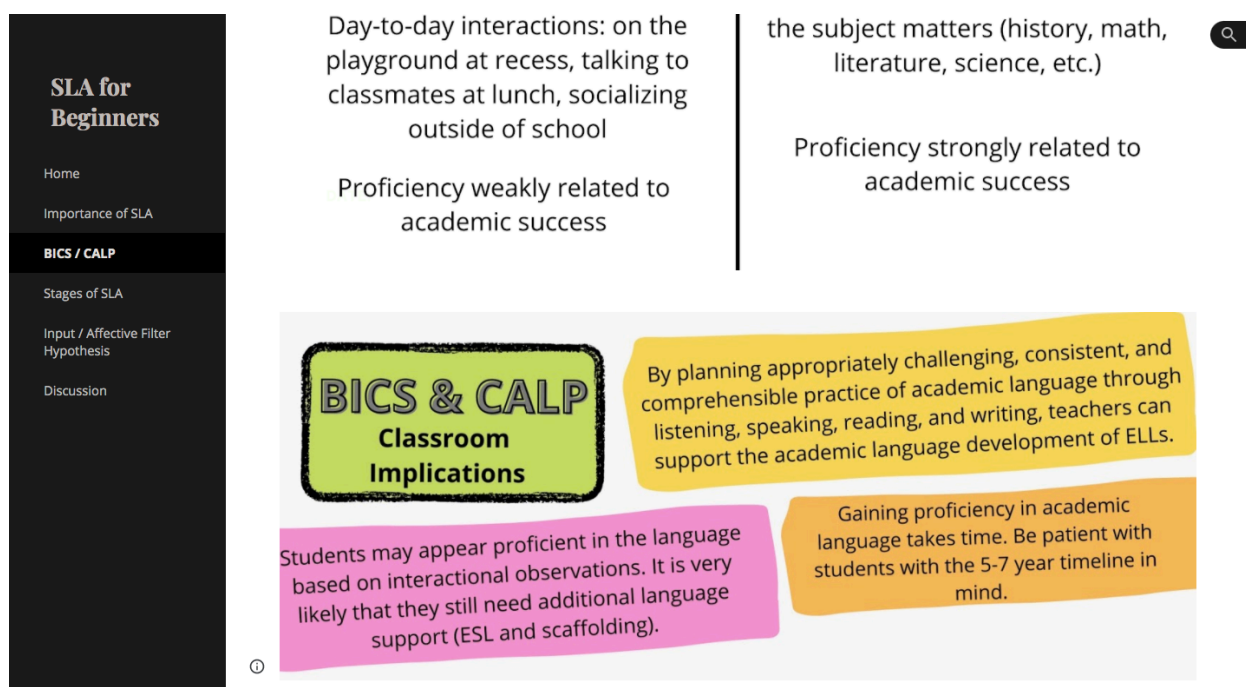


Figure 4.5: Second Language Acquisition Timeline Part 2

The third button “How We Acquire Language” takes users to the third page: “How Language is Acquired” (Figure 4.6). On this page, the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis are presented (Figure 4.7). Following the explanation of these two hypotheses, further notes and classroom implications are shown. Lastly, an image that further explains the classroom implications and importance of the affective filter is included (Gonzales, 2020) (Figure 4.8).

SLA for Beginners

Home

Importance of SLA

BICS / CALP

Stages of SLA

Input / Affective Filter Hypothesis

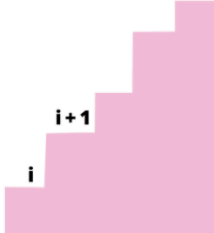
Discussion

How Language is Acquired

Krashen & Terrell (1995) defined several factors that contribute to language acquisition taking place. Two important factors defined by the researchers are what is called the “Input Hypothesis” and the “Affective Filter Hypothesis”.

Comprehensible Input

Acquisition takes place when input is understood that is one step beyond (+1) the current level (i) of language proficiency (i+1)



Affective variables, such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, explain why even if a person receives comprehensible input, they still

In order to grow in language development, the student must hear and understand input in the second language that is **just beyond** their current level of language proficiency.

How can they understand language that's beyond their current level of proficiency?

Providing **context** for what's being expressed in the language: hand gestures, visuals, actions, sounds, etc.

Affective Filter





Figure 4.6: How Language is Acquired Part 1

SLA for Beginners

- Home
- Importance of SLA
- BICS / CALP
- Stages of SLA
- Input / Affective Filter Hypothesis
- Discussion



The **input hypothesis** states that we acquire a second language similar to how we learn our first language as babies: our caretakers modify their speech to make it comprehensible to us. The way we speak to babies starts by being simplified and surrounded by context: what we see, words and short phrases. As a child grows, the way we speak becomes more complex: we use longer sentences and begin to talk about things that are more abstract.

The **affective filter hypothesis** encourages us as teachers to build relationships with students, to encourage their self-confidence, and provide a safe, motivating learning environment. Activities to lower the affective filter:

- Incorporating music into lessons
- Choosing materials and topics of study that interest the student
- Letting the student choose learning activities
- Being conscious of when and how errors are corrected




Figure 4.7: How Language is Acquired Part 2

SLA for Beginners

- Home
- Importance of SLA
- BICS / CALP
- Stages of SLA
- Input / Affective Filter Hypothesis
- Discussion

The image below was created by Valentina Gonzales. You can find the original source of the image, as well as the author's research on the affective filter here: <https://seidlitzblog.org/2020/09/22/what-is-the-affective-filter-and-why-is-it-important-in-the-classroom/>

What is the Affective Filter?

Why is it Important in the Classroom?

affective-
referring to
feelings or
emotions

imaginary wall in the mind





Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis

3 variables in 2nd language acquisition





Figure 4.8: How Language is Acquired Part 3

The fourth button on the home page, “Stages of Acquiring a Language” takes users to the fourth page: “Stages of Language Acquisition” (Figure 4.9). On this page, the importance of knowing the stages of second language acquisition are identified. Following this introductory information, the five stages of language acquisition are described (Figure 4.10). Lastly, classroom implications of the stages of second language acquisition are given (Figure 4.11).

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Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Understanding the process of acquiring a new language is crucial to know how to best support each individual student. The chart below can help in identifying what stage in the process students is currently in. Additionally, it can help us know what to realistically expect from students in each stage (and understand why it may seem like the new student in your class is ignoring you)! Not only does understanding this create awareness and empathy, but also, as you'll see below, it has implications on how we plan for each students' greatest achievement.

Stage	Time after initial exposure to the second language	Student's receptive vocabulary contains about
Stage 1: Preproduction	0-6 MONTHS	500 WORDS
	"Silent Period": Student may not speak at all, or may "parrot" language they hear. Student is listening and absorbing the language. Student is not generating their own speech.	
Stage 2: Early Production	6-12 MONTHS	1000 WORDS
	Student continues to add to their vocabulary by listening. With speech production is still limited, student is more frequently offering one to two word responses of familiar words and phrases. Student generally uses the present tense in speech.	

Figure 4.9: Stages of Language Acquisition Part 1

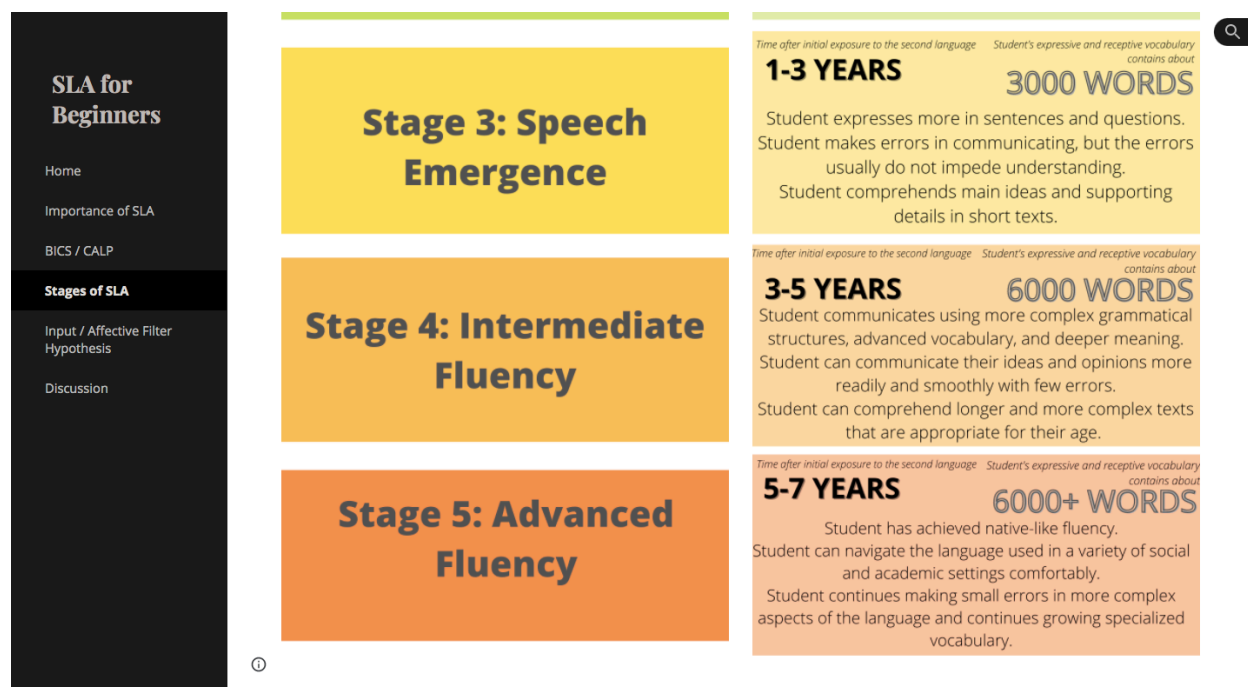


Figure 4.10: Stages of Language Acquisition Part 2

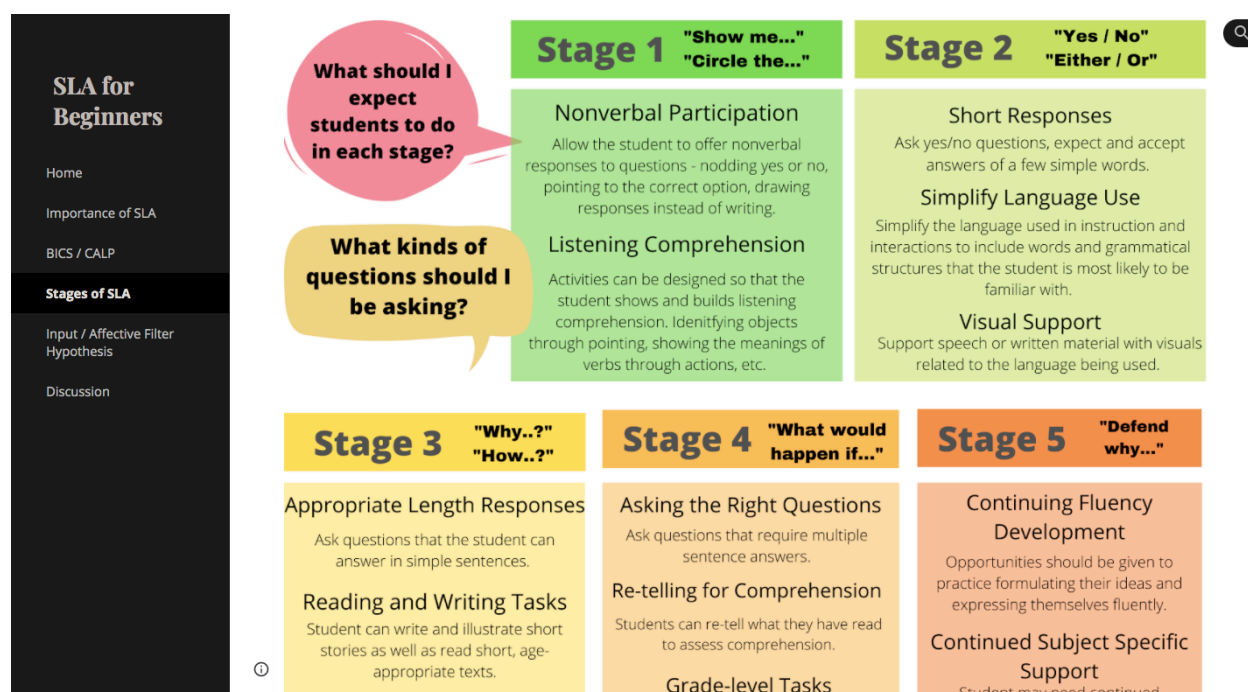


Figure 4.11: Second Language Acquisition Part 3

The fifth button leads to a discussion forum that has been embedded from Padlet (Figure 12). Users can type questions directly into the discussion forum and other users can respond and add to the discussion from their own training and experiences.

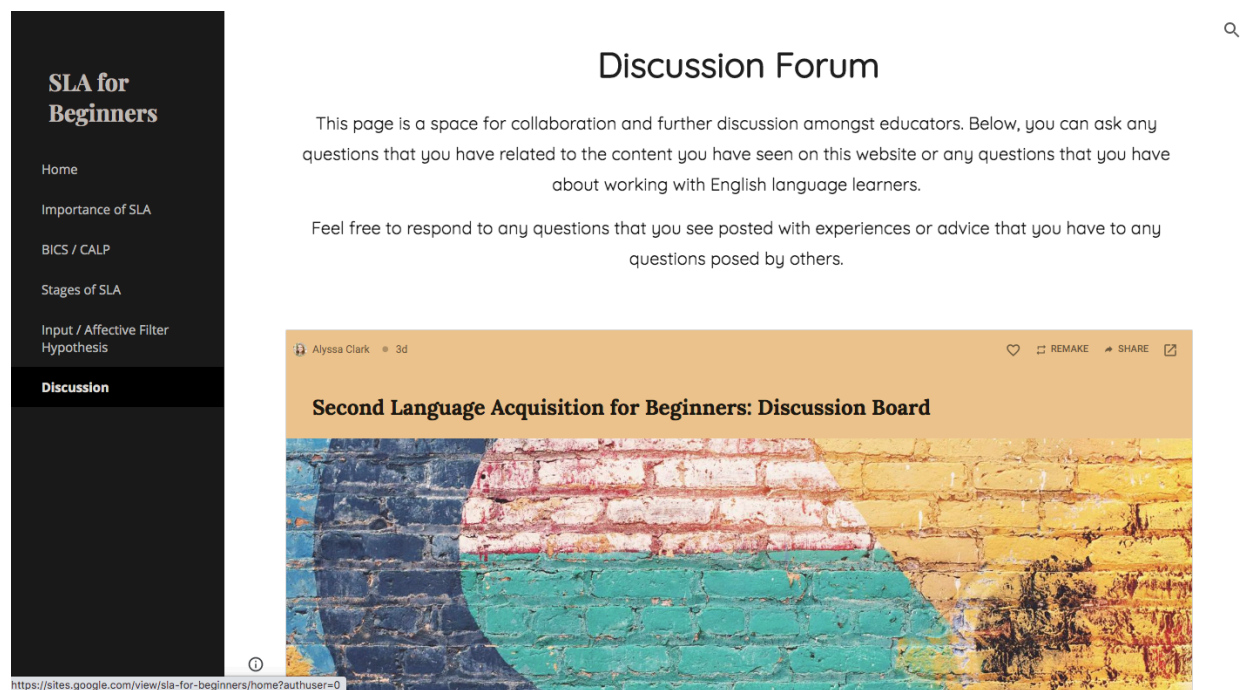


Figure 4.12: Discussion Forum

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The number of English language learners worldwide will likely continue to grow as English holds its status as a global language. As a result, the need for teachers who are knowledgeable about topics related to second language acquisition will grow as well. More specifically, teachers of ELLs in K-12 schools need to have a specialized knowledge base to make the content being taught accessible to all students. Teachers who are trained in second language acquisition theories, not only can better support the process of English language development for their students, but can also grow in empathy for them. The process of acquiring a new language takes time and happens best when students' affective filters are low. Teachers who have reasonable expectations for ELLs at each stage in the language acquisition process can better cultivate a low anxiety learning environment.

In my experience, teachers who have limited training in best practices for teaching ELLs seek to know how to better support these students in their classes. When they come to an ESL teacher for advice, they are intrinsically motivated by the desire to help ELLs to succeed in their mainstream classes. In addition to providing practical strategies they can implement in their classes, having a resource to share with teachers that can help them to grow in the theoretical understandings that inform these strategies can be even more helpful. For example, I often tell teachers to provide options for newcomers to respond to classroom activities in nonverbal ways like drawing or responding to questions with gestures. This can be a helpful strategy to use in the mainstream classroom. However, understanding why this is a helpful strategy based on the

student's current stage in the language acquisition process goes beyond a strategy and empowers the teacher to better adapt instruction to any newcomer in their class.

The teaching profession, based on my own observations and experiences, is filled with people who care about their students and want to see them be successful. However, teachers often face limited time and financial resources that may prevent them from pursuing opportunities for professional development. There is a need for resources that have been well-researched and compiled in a way that is accessible to teachers. My hope for this project is that it can be one resource to share with the teachers at my school and beyond to serve as an introduction to theories of second language acquisition. With this resource, I hope that teachers will be empowered to support the English language development of their students by studying prominent theories in the field of second language acquisition research. The website should be an introduction, and will hopefully encourage further study and inquiry into topics that may help ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

One of the main challenges I faced when completing this project was deciding which topics to include, and which to leave out. As I receive questions and feedback from colleagues and website users, I plan to continue to do research and add more topics to the website as a response. Throughout this semester, as I have shared my progress of this project with colleagues, and I have heard enthusiastic responses. I have encouraged these colleagues to email me with questions they have about teaching ELLs or learning languages in general. So far, I have received many emails with long lists of questions they would like to know more about. I plan to continue to research answers to these questions and compile my own learning in a way that is accessible on the website created for this project. Ultimately, my hope is that, as teachers, we

would never stop learning as we seek to support our students and encourage them to be life-long learners as well.

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